

[A. Harry Williams]

1

Early Settlement

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McLennan County

District # 8

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page no. 1

A. Harry Williams (personal interview)

In 1865, there was only one village in the southern part of what is known as McLennan County. It consisted of one small store, a blacksmith shop, and church was held occasionally out under some Live Oak Trees. The principal merchandise sold was brandied cherries, Hostetter Bitters, tobacco, and groceries. This village was then known as Masterville, now Bruceville, Texas. There were not many people living in its trade territory and these people were joined together for offensive and defensive purposes.

During the war, bushwhackers, army deserters and other bad and dangerous characters drifted into this part of the country. At this time, E. Tom Cox, a great hunter, lived at Masterville. One of his neighbors, Henry Williams owned a few negroes. Cox and Williams trained the dogs by having them run one of these negroes. These dogs were very useful in deer hunts. In a deer hunt, old Roller, the leader of the pack, chased the deer into the

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hidden camp of these outlaws in one of the upper marsh thickets on South Cow Bayou. The outlaws recognized the dog as being one of Tom Cox's "negro dogs" and killed him. They decided that Cox was out after them with the dogs, so they sent him a warning note, which was dropped in a store in Waco village where Cox and Williams were known to trade. The note stated: " We have heard and we know you have been hunting and trying to run us [down?] with "negro dogs". So we are sending you this note and now warning you that if you three D—D—D— don't leave this county and that at once, we will shoot your d —— hides so full of holes that they won't hold corn shucks." This open note was signed by a dozen of these known bad men. The store keeper put a boy on a horse to take the note to Cox and Williams and their close companion, Bill Long. [C12?] [?] [Texas?] 2 They decided they must answer the note. To be sure that their reply was received by the bad men, they sent it direct to their camp. The outlaws had moved their camp to thickets of Owl Creek beyond the Leon River. The answer was addressed to the signers of the threatening note. The answer was: "We have received the note dropped by you and signed by several of you. Answering the same, we wish to say that we have not been hunting you with negro dogs, or in any way hunting you or meddling with you or any of your sort. We are living here, as you know, have our families here and all we have is here. we did not come here to be run off and we are not going and all we ask of you is not to shoot from behind a tree." This was signed by [Tom?] Cox, Henry Williams and Bill Long. Three men against dozens of outlaws. The friends went armed and met often to talk over the situation.

Williams' horse, Billy Buttons, was the fastest horse in this part of the country. One afternoons as Williams was going home from a visit to Cox, Cox decided to play a joke on Williams and at the same time see how fast the horse, Billy, could run. He put on a strange hat, got on a strange horse, and took a short cut up a long branch. By riding fast, he came out in sight of Williams who was just about half way across the prairie. Cox had with him a big, old, muzzle-loading rifle. He thought that Williams would run for the brush when he saw what he thought was a stranger, but, instead, Williams slipped off on the far side of his horse and laid his old shot gun, known as "Old Betsey" across the saddle.

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Cox knew just how Williams was armed, and how far a bullet from “Betsey” would carry, so he stayed back out of gun-shot range and sent a bullet from his longer-ranged rifle singing over Williams' head. Instead of running, at the report of the rifle, Williams leaped into the saddle and started full speed right at the man with the rifle. 3 In the twinkling of an eye, Cox realized that the joke had turned with a vengeance—that Williams' “Betsey” chambered twenty-one buck-shots in each barrels that Williams was a dead shot—that he had nothing but an empty rifle. It was up to him to let his friend know who he really was, and do it quickly. Before this, they had agreed that , if at any time, one must make himself known to the other, that he would pull off his hat and hold it high in the air on the end of his gun. William was often heard to say that he never saw a hat get on a gun so quick and get up so high in the air in such a little time as Tom Cox's hat did that evening. Long before he Williams got in range of with “Old Betsey”, Tom hollered out: “Hold up Henry, this is only Tom.” This was an unthoughted joke and came very near being a tragedy. But E. Tom Cox was a great practical joker until he died. Ever after this, when Cox got too rough, Williams would say to him: “Probably you want to see how fast Billy Buttons can run.”